

ANARCHISM AND THE MORALITY OF VIOLENCE

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Since the Second World War the idea of anarchism has enjoyed a certain revival. Among those who have contributed to this modest revival are Erich Fromm the psychologist, the sociologist C. Wright Mills, such critics and poets as Sir Herbert Read, Kenneth Rexroth and Kenneth Patchen, and the novelists George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, Norman Mailer, Waldo Frank and Albert Camus. Perhaps none of these writers would be willing to call himself an anarchist; but each, in his own way, has attempted to draw attention to the excesses of the modern nation-state and advocated, in one way or another, the decentralization of the state's political, economic and military power.

The importance of anarchism lies in the fact that it is alone among contemporary political doctrines in opposing the institution of the state, stressing the danger while denying the necessity of centralized authority. Socialism, Communism, and what is at present called Democratic Capitalism (the Welfare State) have, on the other hand, both accommodated themselves to and actively encouraged the growth of the national state. Thus supported from within and without (through international rivalry) the state has become the paramount institution of modern civilization, and exerts an increasing degree of control over the lives of all who live beneath its domination.

As the state continues to grow, assuming to itself not only political and military power but also more and more direct economic and social power, the average man of today finds his role subtly changed from that of citizen to that of functionary in a gigantic and fantastically-complex social machine. This development takes place no matter what the official ideology of the state may be, so that we may now observe a gradual convergence of ends and means in the historical evolution of such typical modern states as the U. S. A. and the U. S. S. R., which tend to resemble each other more and more with each passing year despite the fact that the two states originated under greatly unlike circumstances and attempted to guide their progress by official political philosophies which, in most important respects, are sharply opposed. This process of growth and convergence cannot be satisfactorily explained through the use of such conventional concepts as Democracy versus Communism, or Capitalism versus Socialism; the peculiar relevance and appeal of anarchism consists in this, that it offers a possible theoretical key to the understanding of historical developments which seem to have little connection with their customary labels.

#### Statement of the Problem:

The idea of anarchism is embarrassed, however, by its traditional association with illegality and violence. The word itself is sufficient to evoke visions of riot and revolution, bombings and assassinations, in the minds of many who might otherwise

be willing to lend to anarchism a measured degree of sympathetic consideration. If anarchism is to regain the intellectual respectability which it deserves, two preliminary questions must be answered: (1) To what extent is the traditional association of anarchism and violence warranted? And (2), In so far as the association is a valid one, what arguments have the anarchists presented, explicitly or implicitly, to justify the use of violence? It is the purpose of this thesis to investigate the above two questions.

#### Definitions:

As used in this essay, "violence" means the illegal or extra-legal use of force--whether an isolated act of terrorism, such as a bombing or assassination, or a large-scale organized insurrection--to obtain political ends. Violence in this sense is to be distinguished from the occasional acts of brute force committed by the professional criminal in the pursuit of his private ends, and also from the systematic and legalistic use of violence exercised by the state or government in the defense of its interests.

The term "morality of violence," as herein employed, refers to the general question of how and under what circumstances the use of violence (as defined above) can be justified. By treating this as a question of "morality," the justification of violence will have to be made in terms of right and wrong, good and bad, and not simply as a matter of strategy or tactics in the art of revolution.

Procedure:

In answering the two questions set above, which constitutes the purpose of this thesis, the procedure will be as follows: Chapter II will be concerned with the theorists or major writers of the anarchist movement, beginning with Godwin, including Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin, and ending with Sorel, and the repudiation or defense of violence as presented by each. Chapter III will be concerned with those anarchists known historically as the "terrorists," that is, with those who not only preached but also practiced political violence, and with the arguments used by such sympathizers as Emma Goldman and Albert Camus in attempting to justify their deeds. In Chapter IV the findings will be summarized, the anarchist defense of violence will be further investigated and evaluated, and certain inadequacies in that defense will be pointed out.

This essay does not attempt a comprehensive survey of anarchist doctrine or practice with respect to violence, but concentrates rather on those anarchist writers who were most prominent and influential in the movement, and on those among its active practitioners who seem most representative of the spirit of anarchism and who are largely responsible for its distinctive reputation. The student of political theory will not find herein any reference to theories of violence among the anarchists of Italy or Spain, or any mention of such isolated and unique figures as Lao-Tse, Stirner or Thoreau; while highly interesting these latter personages seem, even for anarchists, too special and eccentric to be typical.



## CHAPTER II

### ANARCHIST VIOLENCE: THE THEORISTS

#### Godwin:

William Godwin, though he never called himself an anarchist, was the first to formulate a systematic theory of society and the State in terms so libertarian as to be anarchistic. In his well-known Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793) Godwin advocated the devolution of government to the parish community, the substitution of a citizens' militia for the regular army, reliance on the power of innate reason as a preventive of crime, and the eventual abolition (by peaceful means) of the national State. In addition, he insisted upon a terminological distinction which was to become standard among anarchists: Human society is necessary, just and beneficial, but institutionalized government--the State--is a parasitic organ which feeds on society and also interferes, usually on behalf of the rich and powerful, in society's internal affairs. If Proudhon was the "father" of European anarchism then Godwin was surely the "grandfather."

Godwin's view of violence is presented without ambiguity in his Enquiry.<sup>1</sup> He is against it. His opposition to the use of

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<sup>1</sup>William Godwin, Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness, (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1946), Volume I, Book IV, Chapters I, II, and IV.

illegal force goes so far as to include even opposition to tyrannicide. He is willing to grant that a tyrant may be killed in repelling a personal assault, but this is the only exception he will allow. He argues that if a nation under despotism is ready for liberty its people will dispose of their tyrant openly, publicly, and with a show of legality. If the nation is not ready for liberty then an assassination, conducted as it must be in stealth, deception and a generally criminal atmosphere, will only lead to evils greater than the evil eliminated. "In the climate of despotism," writes Godwin, "some solitary virtues may spring up. But, in the midst of plots and conspiracies, there is neither truth, nor confidence, nor love, nor humanity."<sup>2</sup> The libertarian society which Godwin desires can exist only upon the basis of mutual esteem and trust among the majority of its citizens; acts of violence performed in secrecy, no matter how admirable the intent, tend to weaken the society's moral foundation.<sup>3</sup>

For reasons similar to those given above, Godwin also opposes insurrections and revolutions. If a strong majority of a given society is ready for and determined upon some reform in its social life, then violence is not necessary; and if the majority is not ready then the change should not be attempted.<sup>4</sup> In the former case, Godwin

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<sup>2</sup> Godwin, op. cit., p. 302.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 303-304.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 253-54.

Godwin assumes that a majority is always irresistible, when reason and the right are on the side of the majority, no matter how powerful, in military terms, the ruling class may happen to be.

. . . Either the people are unenlightened and unprepared for a state of freedom, and then the struggle and the consequences of the struggle will be truly perilous; or the progress of political knowledge among them is decisive, and then everyone will see how futile and short-lived will be the attempt to hold them in subjection . . . .<sup>5</sup>

In the face of enlightened conviction, Godwin believed, oppression must wither away, for, as he also held, government cannot exist without the active consent and support of the citizenry.

As for the second case--a revolution attempted by a minority--Godwin's opposition is equally resolute and based on arguments perhaps more convincing. Nothing could be more indefensible than for a minority to attempt, by force, to upset the structure of society in order to establish what they, the minority, believe to be a better order of affairs. First, because no people are ready to participate in freedom who still lack the love of freedom; nothing but tragedy of the most dreadful and bloody kind can result from an effort to goad or push the people into a condition for which they are not prepared.<sup>6</sup> Second, because the attempt by a minority to impose a revolution upon a reluctant or apathetic nation, in the face of active resistance by the ruling power, is in itself, according to

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 257.

Godwin, a form of oppression at least as bad and often worse than the oppression which the revolution is meant to destroy. "To dragoon men into what we think right," says Godwin, "is an intolerable tyranny. It leads to unlimited disorder and injustice."<sup>7</sup>

Godwin did not think that a revolution, accompanied as it must be by crime, bloodshed, and the sowing of distrust and hatred, could be justified by an outcome which is successful from the point of view of the revolutionaries. For in Godwin's thought, as has been said before, no innovation in society, whether trivial or fundamental, can be successful unless the majority of men are not only willing and eager but also wise enough to accept such a change. And if they are wise enough then, once again, violence is rendered not only pernicious but superfluous. Writing during the time of the French Revolution, Godwin took great pains to clear himself from any suspicion of supporting a cause which might employ methods like those demonstrated by the French; furthermore, being a true child of the Enlightenment, Godwin enjoyed a strong faith in the powers of reason and in the certitude of steady, unswerving social progress through the application of reason:

The great cause of humanity, which is now pleading in the face of the universe, has but two enemies; those friends of antiquity, and those friends of innovation, who, impatient of suspense, are inclined violently to interrupt the calm, the incessant, the rapid and auspicious progress which thought and reflection appear to be making in the world.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

Happy would it be for mankind, if those persons who interest themselves most zealously in these great questions, would confine their exertions, to the diffusing, in every possible mode, a spirit of inquiry, and the embracing every opportunity of increasing the stock, and<sup>8</sup> generalising the communication, of political knowledge!

In conclusion, it should be noted that Godwin was not a pacifist in any standard sense of the word; he took for granted the right to kill in self-defense, and the right of societies and nations to engage in wars of self-defense. The anarchist movement has included many pacifists (e.g., Leo Tolstoy) but William Godwin, the first important European anarchist, was not one of them. His rejection of revolutionary violence, therefore, appears to be based as firmly on a sense of social decorum as on general humanitarianism.<sup>9</sup> He expresses his point of view on this matter with admirable clarity near the end of his discussion of revolution:

It is not because human life is of so considerable value that we ought to recoil from the shedding of blood . . . . Death is in itself among the slightest of human evils. An earthquake which should swallow up a hundred thousand individuals at once, would chiefly be to be regretted for the anguish it entailed upon survivors; in a fair estimate of those it destroyed, it would often be comparatively a trivial event . . . . The case is altogether different, when man falls by the hand of his neighbor. Here a thousand ill passions are generated. The perpetrators, and the witnesses of murders, become obdurate, unrelenting, and inhuman. Those who sustain the loss of relatives or friends by a catastrophe of this sort, are filled with indignation and revenge. Distrust is propagated from man to man, and the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>9</sup> Godwin was an Englishman, of course.

dearest ties of human society are dissolved. It is impossible to devise a temper more inauspicious to the cultivation of justice, and the diffusion of benevolence.<sup>10</sup>

### Proudhon:

The anarchism of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) was in many respects similar to that of Godwin. Like the Englishman, he was born a member of the lower middle class and despite his famous and quasi-paradoxical dictum that "All property is theft"<sup>11</sup> he retained, to the end of his life, much of the viewpoint of the peasant, the artisan, the small property-owner. Far from condemning the institution of private property, Proudhon considered it the indispensable basis of individual liberty, and the right, therefore, of every citizen. In attacking "property" Proudhon meant the sum of abuses to which property sometimes lends itself, the kind of property which enables the man who owns it to exploit and live upon the labor of others--in short, all that is inherent in the devices of interest, usury, rent, and profit. Property as possession, the right of a man to control his home, the tools and land or shop he needs to work with and live from, Proudhon regarded as the foundation of freedom; he set himself in permanent opposition to the Marxist Communists not only because they justified the authoritarian State but also because they wished to abolish private property.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 271-272.

<sup>11</sup>Proudhon's answer to the question he sets himself in his first important work, Qu'est-ce-que la Propriete? (1840).

Nothing in this view of property is sufficient, of course, to establish Proudhon as the self-announced father of anarchism.<sup>12</sup> Proudhon's claim to the title rests on his denunciation of centralized government, which he (like Godwin) held to be the instrument not only of political oppression but also of economic oppression--the tool of that class whose accumulated property enables them to dominate others. In place of the State, Proudhon advocated a loosely-federated society of small, independent producers (farmers and craftsmen) bound together by a system of free contracts and mutual agreements. Later in his career Proudhon made efforts, partially successful, to accommodate his individualist anarchism to the fact of modern industrialism--French Syndicalism was deeply influenced by his work--but he never overcame completely the outlook of the small working proprietor.

Again in the manner of Godwin,<sup>13</sup> Proudhon was inclined to distrust the use of violence as an instrument of progress, although in his language he was anything but pacific or moderate; when

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<sup>12</sup>Of European anarchism. Josiah Warren in the United States had proclaimed the "sovereignty of the individual" as early as 1833, in his periodical The Peaceful Revolutionist.

<sup>13</sup>George Woodcock, Proudhon's most recent biographer, in raising the question of Godwin's possible influence upon Proudhon, points out that the latter, in his Les Contradictions Economiques, (1846), classifies Godwin with Owen as a "communist," making it improbable that Proudhon had read the Enquiry Concerning Political Justice.

denouncing the evils of the State he indulged himself in phillipics which almost anticipate the great Bakunin. The following excerpt from Proudhon's book The General Idea of the Revolution (1851) might serve as a model of the anarchist temper, when that temper has been properly excited by the appropriate object:

To be governed is to have every deed of ours, every action and movement, noted, registered, reviewed, docketed, measured, filed, assessed, guaranteed, licensed, authorized, recommended, prohibited, checked, reformed, redressed, corrected; under pretense of public policy to be taxed, dragooned, conscripted, imprisoned, exploited, cajoled, forced, cheated, robbed; at the least sign of resistance or complaint to be repressed, convicted, vilified, vexed, hunted, mauled, murdered, stripped, hanged, shot, slaughtered, judged, condemned, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed, and finally mocked, flouted, outraged, and dishonored. That is government . . . .<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the intemperate tone, Proudhon opposed the use of force in politics, suggesting instead a program of general anarchist education which he hoped would lead gradually and peacefully to the suppression, one by one, of the various functions of the State. "The social revolution is seriously compromised," wrote Proudhon in his diary in 1845, "if it comes through a political revolution." (By "political revolution" he meant violence.) "The workers, once they are organized and marching through work to the conquest of the world, should in no event make an uprising, but become all by invading all through force of principle."<sup>15</sup> To this he adds the hope

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<sup>14</sup>As translated and quoted by Albert Weisbord in The Conquest of Power (New York: Covici, Friede, 1937), Volume I, p. 355.

<sup>15</sup>George Woodcock, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), p. 75.



that the social revolution can be accomplished peaceably through the establishment of economic associations for exchange of produce and co-operative labor; he places the scene of the approaching struggle, not in the streets, but on the land, in the workshops and factories.<sup>16</sup>

The economic associations referred to above, which Proudhon saw as the logical resolution of the old social contradiction of liberty and regulation, would achieve ultimate success, in his vision, through the gradual and peaceful extension of their activities, on a wholly voluntary basis, throughout European society, each industrial center functioning as an independent but not isolated nexus of an organizational network.<sup>17</sup>

Proudhon's opinion of revolutionary violence is further elaborated in his letter of 1846 to Karl Marx, replying to Marx's proposal of a "sustained correspondence" to be carried on among radicals of all nations for the purpose of refining political propaganda and promoting international cooperation (among revolutionaries). Proudhon agrees to the proposal, but with little enthusiasm, urging upon Marx the necessity of avoiding the tendency of revolutionary thought to become dogmatic, intolerant and fanatic, and the tendency of revolutionary leaders (such as Marx) to regard themselves as the apostles of a new religion: ". . . Let us never regard a question as exhausted, and when we have used our last argument, let us begin again, if necessary, with eloquence and irony.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 76.      <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

On that condition I will gladly enter into your association. Otherwise--

no!"<sup>18</sup> From here he goes on to a short discussion of Marx's talk of "action":

I have also some observations to make on this phrase of your letter: at the moment of action. Perhaps you still retain the opinion that no reform is possible without a coup de main, without what was formerly called a revolution and is really nothing but a shock. That opinion, which I understand . . . having myself shared it for a long time, my most recent studies have made me completely abandon. I believe we have no need of it in order to succeed; and that consequently we should not put forward revolutionary action as a means of social reform because that pretended means would simply be an appeal to force, to arbitrariness, in brief, a contradiction. I myself put the problem in this way: . . . through Political Economy to turn the theory of Property against Property in such a way as to engender . . . liberty or equality. . . . I would therefore prefer to burn Property by a slow fire, rather than give it new strength by making a St. Bartholomew's night of the proprietors.<sup>19</sup>

To this letter Marx never replied; doubtless he found it disappointing. Soon afterwards he was to become one of Proudhon's most faithful enemies.

Proudhon's aversion to violence was subjected to a considerable test during the hectic days of 1848. Like many others, he foresaw the coming outbreak, and despite his revolutionary philosophy, he viewed it with apprehension. "In the scuffle," he wrote in his diary, "there is no longer any room for reason. I am more and more convinced that I have no place in this situation."<sup>20</sup> And a little later, on the day the Republic was established, he wrote: "The mess is going to be

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 92, 93.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

inextricable . . . I have no place in it . . . They have made a revolution without ideas."<sup>21</sup> He suffered, apparently, from a curious mixture of emotions during the time of actual fighting. Notwithstanding his profession of being "out of it" he could not repress his sympathies for the workers, nor resist the contagion of revolutionary activity. He remained in Paris throughout the time of the disturbances, took some hand in the erection of street barricades (a familiar Parisian rite), printed one of the first republican manifestoes, and was "present," according to Woodcock,<sup>22</sup> at the invasion of the Tuileries by the people, an event which Flaubert described in the novel A Sentimental Education as being more in the character of a holiday-outing than a military engagement.<sup>23</sup>

But the passage of time and events in '48 did nothing to lighten Proudhon's disillusion; on the contrary, most of his gloomy premonitions were fulfilled, particularly his central thesis that social reform could not be effected through a merely political reform; the suppression of the June uprising, followed in December by the overwhelming victory of Louis Napoleon in the Plebiscite,<sup>24</sup> confirmed his antipathy to political rearrangements sanctioned either by violence or by demagogical head-counting.

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>23</sup>Gustave Flaubert, A Sentimental Education (New York: New Directions, 1957), pp. 385-392.

<sup>24</sup>Events remarkably similar to those which occurred in France exactly one hundred and ten years later.

Proudhon's most emphatic rejection of violence as the means to a better society appears in one of his last important works, De la Justice dans la Revolution et dans l'Eglise (1858). In this vast, almost encyclopedic book, which includes disquisitions on such topics as free will and determinism, the creation of God, the history of the Church, marriage, love, and the inequality of the sexes, the perversion of justice by the State and its rectification, through liberty and equality, by anarchism, Proudhon attempts to demonstrate that justice, as he conceives it, depends upon what he calls the "moral equilibrium" of society. Moral equilibrium is based, in turn, on the self-respect of the individual and on a consequent condition of mutual respect among individuals.<sup>25</sup> When this state of mutual respect is destroyed by violations, on the part of some, of the liberty of others, the inevitable result is despotism, distrust, fear, hatred, and violence, a violence which, far from restoring equilibrium, generates further violence. In arguments which recall those of Godwin, he concentrates his view in an examination of the moral efficacy of regicide,<sup>26</sup> or as he terms it, the "physiologie du regicide." He begins by referring to his own reputation, among the French, as an incendiary revolutionist, the secret author of innumerable criminal assaults upon public order, decency and authority: "Ne suis-je le theoricien de l'anarchie,

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<sup>25</sup>P.-J. Proudhon, De La Justice Dans La Revolution Et Dans L'Eglise (Bruxelles, A. N. LeBegue & Cie., 1860), Vol. IV., Douzieme Etude; "De La Sanction Morale."

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 60-98.

l'ennemi de tous les gouvernements, le Satan de tout ce qui ressemble a une autorite?"<sup>27</sup> He admits that he is; Proudhon could never resist the temptation to indulge, occasionally, in a somewhat sensational rhetoric. More than this, he confesses to moral complicity in past, current and future assassinations and attempted assassinations.

Another rhetorical device--for immediately he makes it clear that his moral complicity consists in no more and no less than his membership in what he considers a sick, divided society; sick because the material interests of the modern world are divorced from its spiritual interests;<sup>28</sup> this division leads to the moral unbalance previously referred to as the basic cause of conflict, of such senseless and useless acts of violence as regicide. "Le regicide est l'acte d'une societe divisee," he writes, "en revolte contre elle-meme, et qui se nie en la personne de son representant."<sup>29</sup>

The only way to eliminate this schism and restore social peace is by reuniting the material interest (equality) with the spiritual (liberty) under the reign of justice; in fact, for Proudhon, the union of the two interests, neither of which can exist without the other, is equivalent to justice.<sup>30</sup>

Proudhon denies the moral validity of regicide, or tyrannicide, therefore, not only because the tyrant is, in a sense, innocent (being as much a symptom as a cause of the social disease),

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 63-65.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>30</sup> Woodcock, op. cit., p. 216.

but also because the act of assassination solves nothing, cures nothing, and involves the entire society in the guilt of both tyrant and assassin:

La punition d'un tyran, pour etre reguliere et juste, suppose: 1° qu'il existe une conscience collective, au nom de laquelle le chef de l'etat peut etre poursuivi; 2° qu'on a defini la tyrannie. Car il est clair que, si l'accusation de tyrannie est abandonnee au sens prive de chaque individu, la certitude du crime disparaissant en meme temps que l'authenticite de la loi qui le punit, au lieu du tyrannicide nous n'avons plus que l'arbitraire des egorgements et la reciprocite de l'assassinat.<sup>31</sup>

He illustrates his argument with many historical examples of the futility of regicide, beginning with the case of Julius Caesar and the notable string of tyrants--Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, etc.--that succeeded him. "Le regicide, en effet, n'aboutit pas," writes Proudhon, "il ne peut pas aboutir. Pourquoi? parce qu'il n'est pas l'acte d'une communaute juridique, qui seule aurait pouvoir de regenerer la society; il est la produit d'une communaute de peche."<sup>32</sup> And again: "Le regicide, enfin, ne resout rien; il empeche meme les solutions de se produire . . ."<sup>33</sup>

Proudhon then proceeds to review the French Revolution, finding the cause of its failures and massacres in the same social sickness--injustice: moral unbalance--which makes regicide an unjustifiable, hopeless and superficial act. If regicide solves nothing, then a revolution which is limited to the political sphere--

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<sup>31</sup>Proudhon, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 80.      <sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

the substitution of one ruling group for another--likewise solves nothing. In so far as the great Revolution of 1789-94 was successful, it was so because of the opportunities it provided for needed transformations in the economic and social structure of French society.<sup>34</sup> (E.g., the suppression of feudal privileges, the division of certain manorial estates among the peasants.)

In summation, Proudhon found little to hope for through violence, whether in the individual deed of the assassin or in the organized large-scale insurrection of the professional revolutionaries. He believed, like Godwin, that only reason could make men free, a belief which we can no longer regard as optimistic. Was his opposition to violence of a "moral" nature, or merely a question of tactics? Would Proudhon have said that violence is unjustified on pragmatic grounds simply because it fails to achieve its object? It seems rather that there is, implicit in Proudhon's thought, the recognition of the continuity of ends and means; the means not only determine the end but are themselves ends, as the end, in its turn, functions as the means to a further end. Violence is not wrong because it usually fails; it fails because it is usually wrong. Justice cannot be achieved through injustice;<sup>35</sup> this much, at least, is stated over and over again in the work of the "father" of anarchism. And justice, if not precisely identical to morality, is certainly the social expression of morality.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 85-93.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

The results of the investigation of anarchism and violence may be said to be, so far, somewhat disappointing. For the first two prominent anarchists on the stage of European history fail not only to justify violence--they also repudiate violence. Anarchism, supported by no more than the methodical common sense of Godwin and the complicated philosophizing of Proudhon, might never have acquired that truly revolutionary character and elan for which it is famous, if a new and powerful personality had not soon appeared--Michael Alexandrovitch Bakunin (1814-1876). It was Bakunin who diverted anarchism from the endless elaboration of theory to the road of revolutionary action.

#### Bakunin:

The political philosophy of Godwin and Proudhon was the most radical expression of middle-class liberalism; it represented, essentially, the hopes and fears of small property owners,--farmers, artisans, the independent producers. The overwhelming success of large-scale industrialism and capitalism, however, reduced this class to political and economic impotence; most of its members were destined to end with their necks in white collars as minor clerks, officials and functionaries within the industrial hierarchy; those who remained outside the machine became so few in numbers as to be socially powerless; those within the machine supported the machine. If anarchism was to become an effective force in politics then a new source of support would have to be found. It was the role of Bakunin



to give anarchism a renewed vigor by combining the libertarianism of Godwin and Proudhon with the socialism of Marx, thus making it possible for anarchism to appeal not only to isolated intellectuals but also to the newly-created multitudes of unhappy factory workers. More important than this expansion of anarchist philosophy, however, was the contribution made by Bakunin's romantic, fervent enthusiasm for action--revolutionary action. In a way that Proudhon could never have done, Bakunin preached and harangued, conspired and organized, and when the opportunities arrived, actively fought for an anarchist revolution. Every upheaval in society, whether large or small, promising or sure to fail, was supported by Bakunin during his lifetime. He, more than any other man, inspired the nihilist terrorists in Russia, and all those other young men and women who, late in the 19th and early in the 20th century, attempted to overthrow the existing order by the "propaganda of the deed"--assassination and self-sacrifice.

Clearly then, Bakunin had no qualms concerning the use or even abuse of violence; he was whole-heartedly in favor of it. "Let us put our trust in the eternal spirit which destroys and annihilates only because it is the unsearchable and eternally creative source of all life," he wrote, at the onset of his career as a professional revolutionist. "The passion for destruction is also a creative passion!"<sup>36</sup> This was written while Bakunin was still under the

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<sup>36</sup> As quoted by E. H. Carr, Michael Bakunin (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1937), p. 110.

influence of Hegel; later, his pronouncements on violence were to become more concrete, less poetical and metaphysical:

Revolutions are not child's play, nor are they academic debates in which only vanities are hurt . . . nor literary jousts wherein only ink is spilled . . . Revolution means war, and that implies the destruction of men and things. Of course it is a pity that humanity has not yet invented a more peaceful means of progress, but until now every forward step in history has been achieved only after it has been baptized in blood.<sup>37</sup>

To which he adds, in a casual effort at justification:

" . . . Reaction can hardly reproach revolution on this point; it has always shed more blood than the latter."<sup>38</sup>

For Bakunin, civilization was confronted by one central problem: the full and final emancipation of the "proletariat" from economic injustice and oppression by the State. And in his view the defenders of the establishment--State, the Church, and Capitalism--were not likely to surrender their advantages and privileges without "a terrible and bloody struggle."<sup>39</sup> To attain this emancipation it would be necessary to destroy all modern institutions: not only the State but also the Church, Courts, Universities, Armies and Police; and not only in one country but in all countries.<sup>40</sup> Why? Because these institutions and countries are bound together in formal alliance and informal but equally strong ties of mutual interest.

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<sup>37</sup> M. A. Bakunin, The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism, G. P. Maximoff (ed.) (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1953), p. 372.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 372.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 374.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 374.

Any attempt to rely on a revolution in a single country would invite a conspiracy among surrounding countries to destroy the revolution.

If violence cannot obtain justice for the people, asks Bakunin, what can? A miracle? The moral conversion of the middle class? The spontaneous surrender, by the ruling class, of their power?<sup>41</sup> For him, these are only rhetorical questions; he asks them in so scornful a manner as to preclude debate. Nor is a belief in the justness of their cause, or its truth, sufficient to insure victory; the workers and peasants, Bakunin asserts repeatedly, can win liberty only through the use of force.<sup>42</sup>

He modifies his advocacy of violence, slightly, by urging the workers, once they have won the revolution, to treat their vanquished enemies with humaneness: "Recognize them as your brothers and invite them to live and work alongside of you upon the unshakable foundation of social equality."<sup>43</sup> Those who do not want to participate in the new society shall have the right to starve themselves to death, or to live on public charity, or to exile themselves; the irreconcilable enemies of the Revolution, if not killed during the fighting, shall be exiled: " . . . They shall be permitted to go wherever they wish; the Revolution will even grant a certain sum to every one of them to enable them to live out their days and hide their shame."<sup>44</sup> Bakunin

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 377.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 376.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 377.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 413.

was not troubled by the small contradictions which frequently appear in his writings and speeches; like Whitman's, his philosophy was vast enough and incoherent enough to include many contradictions, even to thrive on them. He argues that there will be no place for terrorism in his revolution, that the anarchists will oppose any attempt at the kind of legalistic, judicial murders that disgraced the Revolution in France in 1793-94. In short, no capital punishment will be allowed--once the fighting has expired and the people restore peace.<sup>45</sup> There seems no reason to doubt Bakunin's sincerity on this point; he himself had good reason for revulsion against official, authorized, juridical vengeance.<sup>46</sup> But against his good intentions stands his curious exaltation of violence in its wildest and blindest forms. He assigns a progressive role to disorder of almost any kind, including not only the general strike but civil war.<sup>47</sup> But it is popular, spontaneous rebellion which evokes his most spectacular enthusiasms:

The sentiment of rebellion, this satanic pride, which spurns subjection to any master whatsoever, whether of divine or human origin, alone produces in man a love for independence and freedom . . .

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 413.

<sup>46</sup> Bakunin was twice condemned to death, first by the Saxon Government, then by the Austrian; during his imprisonment by the latter he was chained to the wall of his cell for a period of over three months; he was kept in solitary confinement for most of the eight years during which he was a prisoner of the Saxon, then the Austrian, then the Russian governments. Cf., Carr, op. cit., pp. 197-225.

<sup>47</sup> Maximoff, op. cit., p. 407.

A rebellion on the part of the people, which by nature is spontaneous, chaotic, and ruthless, always presupposes a vast destruction of property. The working masses are ever ready for such sacrifices: that is why they constitute the rude, savage force capable of heroic feats and of carrying out aims seemingly impossible of realization, and that is so because, having very little or no property, they have not been corrupted by it. When the exigencies of defense or victory demand it, they will not stop at the destruction of their own villages and cities, and inasmuch as property in most cases does not belong to the people, they very often evince a positive passion for destruction.

This negative [sic] passion . . . is far from rising to the great height of the revolutionary cause; but without that passion the revolutionary cause is impossible of realization, for there can be no revolution without a sweeping and passionate destruction, a salutary and fruitful destruction, since by means of such destruction new worlds are born . . . .<sup>48</sup>

In social obstetrics only the Caesarean section is to be permitted. Nor is it likely that Bakunin was merely being carried away by his own eloquence, when he allowed himself such extreme expression; although he was, in action, a rather bumbling, inept, and ineffectual revolutionist, he was certainly a sincere one. His role in the Dresden uprising of 1849, in which he was involved almost by accident, in the beginning, but to which he attached himself to the bitter end, demonstrates his revolutionary fidelity.<sup>49</sup> Much later, after his ten years of imprisonment and his return to Europe, he was still capable of personal participation in certain uprisings which promised to be revolutionary--the Lyons affair in 1871 and that of Bologna in 1874.<sup>50</sup> Both proved to be fiascos--indeed, almost

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 380-381.

<sup>49</sup>Cf., Carr, op. cit., pp. 189-194.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 466-499.

everything Bakunin attempted ended in failure--but at least he was there, risking his liberty and life and often his dignity in badly-planned, poorly-organized, inconclusive and inconsequential revolts. Yet no evidence exists to show that Bakunin was as ferocious in actual behavior as he was in his language; he was certainly an enthusiast of destruction but he never threw a bomb, fired a piston or wielded a club with his own hands; he was an organizer (of sorts) and a leader (a brilliant orator), but not a soldier. In so far as he shared the passion for destruction which he was continually urging upon others, Bakunin seems to have kept it pretty well under control.

Thus far Bakunin's attitude to violence, while extreme, exhibits a rough, approximate kind of morality. He appears to set no limit to his appetite for destruction; apparently the Revolution is desirable enough to justify the almost total razing of property and institutions and a considerable slaughter of human beings. Regrettable, of course; but the Revolution is, as he says, a war--in his belief, a war both just and necessary. Therefore Bakunin's justification of violence is at least as plausible as the justification made for certain "good" and "honorable" wars. The end justifies the method, and the method is not entirely devoid of scruples; wars are fought, traditionally, within the framework of certain rules. Bakunin's endorsement of violence, though suspiciously frenetic, cannot be proved to be without qualification; he does not quite say that destruction is self-justifying, an intrinsic good. Nor does he

say that the end sought, the Revolution, is so important as to justify any means. If this were the end of the matter it would be possible to place Bakunin among the conventional revolutionaries, in terms of moral values no better and no worse for example, than the men, who made the American Revolution. Unfortunately for the reputation of Bakunin and anarchism, however, it is necessary to take under consideration the question of Bakunin's complicity in the activities of the notorious Nechaev, who was the first thoroughly devout revolutionist of modern times, a man who thought and said that the Revolution justified everything and proved his conviction by, among other things, murdering one of his comrades on suspicion of disloyalty.<sup>51</sup>

Bakunin was apparently fascinated by the young Nechaev, when they first met; the meeting occurred before the latter committed his celebrated and original purge. Nechaev was already a dedicated man, however; he made a more striking impression on the old veteran Bakunin than Bakunin made on the fanatical youth. Perhaps Bakunin saw in that ruthlessly amoral fellow-countryman the kind of man he would have liked to have been himself; at any rate the two formed a close association which lasted for more than a year, during which time they produced, probably in collaboration though it is not certain, some revolutionary pamphlets soon to become famous, among them one called the Principles of Revolution and another called The Revolutionary Catechism. Both

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<sup>51</sup>The affair is described by Carr, op. cit., p. 383.

were presented anonymously. In the former appears the following statement:

We recognize no other activity but the work of extermination, but we admit that the forms in which this activity will show itself will be extremely varied--poison, the knife, the rope, etc. In this struggle revolution sanctifies everything alike.<sup>52</sup>

In The Revolutionary Catechism the reader is informed that the true revolutionary "despises and hates present-day social morality in all its forms and motives." Furthermore,

. . . he regards everything as moral which helps the triumph of the revolution . . . All soft and enervating feelings of relationship, friendship, love, gratitude, even honor, must be stifled in him by a cold passion for the revolutionary cause . . . Day and night he must have one thought, one aim--merciless destruction.<sup>53</sup>

Bakunin later repudiated Nechaev, publicly and vigorously, after the details of Nechaev's activity in Russia became known; but the circumstances of their split do not reveal Bakunin in a favorable light. Bakunin's moral indignation against Nechaev, against his doctrines and his acts, seems to have come too late to be fully justified. He was infatuated with Nechaev, before the latter was openly discredited and revealed for what he was; and Bakunin's authorship of the pamphlets mentioned above, while denied by his followers and never surely established, seems nevertheless probable.<sup>54</sup> If Bakunin was capable, even temporarily, of subscribing to the complete amorality of a man like Nechaev, then he was guilty

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 380.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 380.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 375-393.



on at least one of two counts: (1) Either he was a deliberate hypocrite and cynic who preached one doctrine while practicing another, or (2) he was childishly susceptible to the persuasions of a fanatic; such a weakness, in matters involving human life, is a criminal weakness. In either case, his association with Nechaev makes possible the most sinister interpretations of Bakunin's life-long enthusiasm for violence. If justified, these interpretations would include Bakunin in that company of revolutionary absolutists who, in the name of perfect justice in the remote future, feel entitled to commit the most shocking injustices in the present.

#### Kropotkin:

The last important anarchist theoretician of the 19th Century was another Russian, Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921). Like Bakunin, whom he professed to admire but never met, Kropotkin was an active revolutionist as well as thinker; he participated, as organizer and agitator, in a secret society in Russia called the Circle of Tchaikovsky, whose purpose was to spread socialist ideas among the peasants and workers. (In Czarist Russia this was, of course, a crime.) Kropotkin was eventually captured and imprisoned, but he escaped soon afterwards, fled Russia, and spent the rest of his life in various countries in western Europe. Though he considered himself a follower of Bakunin, Kropotkin was not primarily interested in conspiracy or violence; trained as a geologist and geographer, his chief ambition, as an anarchist, was to give anarchism a scientific

justification, as Marx had attempted to do for socialism. To this end, Kropotkin wrote many books, striving to prove the feasibility of an anarchist society through arguments based mainly on his researches in economics and biology.

The chief function of the State, he maintained, is to preside over the warfare of the classes. It has no other justification for existence. If this social conflict could be resolved through providing the members of society with all they needed in economic goods, then the State would be rendered unnecessary. Kropotkin went on to demonstrate that modern techniques in agriculture and industry made an economy of abundance possible. Eliminate poverty and the social struggle will disappear; when the struggle disappears, there is no longer any need for the centralized authority, based on police and military power, of the State. This was the economic argument,<sup>55</sup> which was then supplemented by the biological argument, based on the principles of Darwinism.

Kropotkin pointed out that the principle of natural selection does not necessarily imply the survival of the fittest as individuals. On the contrary, the most successful species in nature are those which form societies. A society is based on co-operation and mutual aid, practices which are at least as basic and natural, among humans, as competition. Anarchism therefore, which depends upon and fosters

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<sup>55</sup> Cf., Kropotkin's Fields, Factories and Workshops; The Conquest of Bread; and Modern Science and Anarchism.

the co-operative instinct, is in harmony with the most fundamental and vital aspects of human nature.<sup>56</sup>

What of revolutionary tactics? How was the anarchist society to be made possible? In short, what did Kropotkin have to say concerning the use of violence?

As mentioned above, Kropotkin was not greatly interested in this question, and did not attempt to deal with it, thoroughly and systematically, anywhere in his writings. His attitude toward violence, however, is clearly implied in such passages as the following from his Memoirs:

. . . I began gradually to understand that revolutions --that is, periods of accelerated rapid evolution and rapid changes--are as much in the nature of human society as the slow evolution which incessantly goes on now among the civilized races of mankind. And each time that such a period of accelerated evolution and reconstruction on a grand scale begins, civil war is liable to break out on a small or large scale. The question is, then, not so much how to avoid revolutions, as how to attain the greatest results with the most limited amounts of civil war, the smallest number of victims, and a minimum of mutual embitterment.<sup>57</sup>

Kropotkin's position on revolutionary violence is thus one intermediate between the gradualism of Proudhon and the extremism of Bakunin. Kropotkin takes it for granted that a certain amount of violence usually is necessary in effecting a radical social change. He neither advocates nor repudiates the use of violence; but assuming

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<sup>56</sup>Cf., Kropotkin's Mutual Aid, A Factor of Evolution; and Ethics: Their Origin and Development.

<sup>57</sup>P. Kropotkin, Memoirs of a Revolutionist (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1899), pp. 290-291.

it inevitable, he thinks that it can be justified if every effort is made to minimize the amount of destruction and bloodshed. This can be done, he thinks, when revolutionary goals are clearly defined and of such a nature as to appeal to the sense of rightness and love of truth in men of all social classes. "If . . . conflict is unavoidable," he writes, ". . . let . . . these conflicts take place, not on the ground of vague aspiration, but upon definite issues; not upon secondary points . . . but upon broad ideas which inspire men by the grandness of the horizon which they bring into view."<sup>58</sup>

Kropotkin believed strongly in the power of persuasion through educational propaganda, through reasoned arguments, moderate in tone, based on the empirical science of his time. And he attempted to appeal not only to the workers and peasants, whose interests he believed himself to be promoting, but also to the men of education and intelligence in the middle and upper classes, whose immediate interests he was opposing. He believed that no revolution, whether peaceful or violent, had ever taken place without the ideals of the revolution already having infected members of the class whose privileges the revolution was attacking.<sup>59</sup> He cites the abolition of serfdom in Russia as an example of this rule. The anarchist revolution, therefore, could be achieved partly through intellectual persuasion, as well as through organization among the workers and the judicious use, when the opportunity arrived, of violence or the threat

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 290.

of violence. Careful preparation, thought Kropotkin, would make more probable the success of the revolution and would, at the same time, reduce to a minimum degree the need for and the amount of violence.<sup>60</sup>

Further light is thrown on Kropotkin's attitude toward violence by considering his sympathy for the heroes and martyrs of the terrorist campaign which took place in Russia from 1878 to 1905. This new era in Russian politics was inaugurated by a girl named Vera Zasulich, who shot and wounded one General Trepoff, chief of the St. Petersburg police, in retaliation for his infliction of corporal punishment upon a group of political prisoners. Her act led to further repressions by the authorities, which inspired further reprisals by the young revolutionaries. A sort of social vendetta between the two groups was set in motion, which resulted in hangings by one side, assassinations by the other, the latter of which included the killing of the Czar in 1881.

There can be no question of Kropotkin's sympathy for the terrorists. He himself had been an active member of that movement in morals and manners, named nihilism by Turgenev, which preceded and indirectly led to the terrorist movement. Kropotkin did not participate in the latter, but he was willing to defend it on the grounds that the Russian Government was the guilty party. He describes, in his Memoirs, the non-violent character of the revolutionary movement in the years 1870-78, and the harsh sentences

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 400.

with which hundreds of its partisans were punished--years of confinement in unpleasant prisons, years of hard labor in the mines, and exile to Siberia. He mentions specific cases of unusual ferocity on the part of the authorities: a boy of nineteen hanged for posting a revolutionary proclamation on the wall of a railway station; a girl of fourteen exiled to Siberia for life, her crime having been an attempt to incite a crowd to rescue a group of revolutionaries on their way to the gallows; and numerous cases, among the political prisoners, of young men driven to suicide, others into insanity. "Sheer exasperation took hold of our young people," writes Kropotkin.<sup>61</sup>

" 'In other countries,' they began to say, 'men have the courage to resist. An Englishman, a Frenchman, would not tolerate such outrages. How can we tolerate them? Let us resist, arms in hands, the nocturnal raids of the gendarmes; let them know, at least, that since arrest means a slow and infamous death at their hands, they will have to take us in a mortal struggle.' "<sup>62</sup> Melodramatic words; a melodramatic generation; and the love of melodrama, in this case, was sufficient to encourage violence. Action followed principles. Kropotkin does not attempt, explicitly, to defend, on moral grounds, the assassinations and bombings, but his sympathy for the terrorists is so great that he can even condone the killing of his own cousin,

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<sup>61</sup>"Young people": in one respect the terrorist movement was a war between two distinct generations--fathers against sons.

<sup>62</sup>Kropotkin, op. cit., p. 427.

Dmitri Kropotkin, who was the governor-general of Kharkoff.

" . . . He was a weak man and a courtier," Kropotkin says, who hesitated to interfere in the ill-treatment of the political prisoners under his jurisdiction.<sup>63</sup> As a result, he was shot, and Kropotkin's words imply that the governor-general deserved no better fate. As for the Czar, killed in 1881 after several previous attempts had failed, Kropotkin has this to say:

If Alexander II had shown at this juncture the least desire to improve the state of affairs in Russia; if he had . . . shown any intention of limiting the powers of the secret police, his steps would have been hailed with enthusiasm. A word would have made him "the liberator" again . . . . But . . . the despot awoke in him, and, . . . following the advice of his evil genius, Katkoff, he found nothing to do but to nominate special military governors--for hanging.<sup>64</sup>

Therefore, says Kropotkin, his end was inevitable--a Shakespearean tragedy of unavoidable fatality. He would not yield; neither would his enemies. On March 13, 1881, a terrorist named Rysakoff threw a bomb under the Czar's coach, stopping it; Rysakoff, making no attempt to escape, was arrested on the spot; the Czar climbed out of his carriage and a second terrorist, Grinevetsky, came close to him and exploded another bomb, killing them both. This was not an accident; men like Rysakoff and Grinevetsky were willing to commit political murders, but insisted, in return, on the sacrifice of their own lives. They could conceive of no other means of justification. With this strange code of honor Kropotkin seems to have been in complete sympathy.

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 428.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., pp. 428-429.

Sorel:

One further thinker must be considered in this essay, and that is the famous syndicalist-moralist Georges Sorel (1847-1922). It is not clearly certain that Sorel ever considered himself an anarchist, despite his long sympathy for the syndicalist labor movement, which was dominated by anarchists and anarchist ideas. In fact his chief interest lay in the possibility of a moral renaissance in Western civilization, a rebirth of heroism, the cultivation of the taste for the sublime, the aspiration for glory in its traditional sense. Sorel was a moralist first, last and always, but an anarchist only for that limited period of time during which it appeared to him that anarchism, as embodied in Syndicalism and the myth (as he freely called it) of the revolutionary general strike, might be the instrument for the ethical reawakening which he so strongly desired. For Sorel the European world was suffering from decadence, from corruption, and only a great and difficult revolutionary movement could redeem it. Moral perfection was his aim; and this, he felt, could be realized only through the devotion, solidarity, and heroism, of the working class engaged in a frankly violent effort to liberate itself from the domination of a capitalist economy and the national State. No other class or segment of society retained the industrial workers' capacity for dedication to long-range and dimly-envisioned goals; only the workers, firmly united among themselves, morally isolated from the surrounding society, were capable, in Sorel's view, of the self-sacrifice required to transform and elevate European



civilization; all other classes, and particularly politicians and intellectuals, he condemned as morally rotten, bogged down hopelessly in self-interest, hedonism, sycophancy and petty scheming.

What Sorel found most appealing in anarchism were not its aims but the overwhelming difficulty of their achievement; not the possibility of a freer, more open society but rather the violent and heroic effort needed to destroy those institutions which bar the way. Not the legendary end but the revolutionary instrument attracted his attention, and this being so, it is not surprising that Sorel shifted at various times in his intellectual career from one extreme to another--at one time, from anarchism to a traditionalist authoritarianism. In each case his motives were the same: he was willing to lend his support to any political movement which required for its success the overcoming of almost impossible obstacles; which required, in other words, the kind of heroic effort in which he thought resided the essence of morality. In so far as Sorel was an anarchist at all, therefore, his anarchism was not only temporary but almost accidental; he played no active part in the Syndicalist movement and contributed nothing to anarchist theory as a socio-political doctrine. But we have also found that anarchism is associated with and sometimes committed to the use of revolutionary tactics; in so far as this is true, Sorel's justification of violence, as expounded during his career as a Syndicalist fellow-traveler, is of considerable interest. At this point should be noted the distinction which Sorel makes between "force" and "violence," a distinction similar to but more special than

that made in the introduction to this essay. For Sorel the meanings of force and violence depend upon the way in which revolutionaries think of their relationship to the state; in force they use the authority of the state to compel obedience to revolutionary goals, but in violence they seek to destroy the authority of the state itself, and to substitute for it not a new political regime but an essentially new form of society based upon a new (anarchist) organization of the economic structure of society. In this usage the two terms define two types of revolution and revolutionaries: the advocates of "force" are those who want to take over and utilize the power of the state; the advocates of "violence" are those who want to abolish the state. Sorel, of course, counted himself among the latter, along with the syndicalists and anarchists.

When Sorel speaks of violence he means, of course, not erratic acts of brutality or crime, but rather the quasi-military engagements which inevitably accompany a social upheaval--the battles of the Marxist class war, which for him is conveniently summed up in the image and myth of the great, cataclysmic and apocalyptic general strike. "Proletarian acts of violence," he writes, " . . . are purely and simply acts of war; they have the value of military demonstrations, and serve to mark the separation of the classes. Everything in war is carried on without hatred and without the spirit of revenge . . . ." <sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Georges Sorel, Reflections on Violence (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), p. 132.

And what are the rewards of such an enterprise? The establishment of a new society conforming a little more closely to the ideal? Not at all; Sorel hardly considers the matter; for him the justification of revolutionary violence lies in the military ethic--loyalty, courage, heroism--which such violence is supposed to generate:

The conception of the general strike, engendered by the practice of violent strikes, admits the conception of an irrevocable overthrow. There is something terrifying in this which will appear more and more terrifying as violence takes a greater place in the mind of the proletariat. But, in undertaking a serious, formidable and sublime work, Socialists [i.e., anarchist-syndicalists] raise themselves above our frivolous society and make themselves worthy of pointing out new roads to the world.

Revolutionary Syndicalism corresponds well enough to the Napoleonic armies whose soldiers accomplished such heroic acts, knowing all the time that they would remain poor.<sup>66</sup>

He further elaborates this idea in pursuing the analogies between the general strike and war, suggesting comparisons between the revolutionary worker and the ancient warriors celebrated by the poets of classical Greece, what he calls "the noble side" of war: the superiority of the soldier to the ordinary conditions of life; the sentiment of glory; the desire to try one's strength in great battles, to conquer glory at the peril of one's life.<sup>67</sup> If there is much in this that resembles Nietzsche, that is no accident. Sorel frequently alludes to and quotes from the German philosopher, and always with admiration and approval. It is obvious that the two men shared many sentiments, the most important of which was a common

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., pp. 187-188.

hatred for the morality of the modern middle class--the commercial morality. This hatred was so strong that each turned for relief to romantic and radical idealizations of the past and prophecies for the future. In a world increasingly dominated by the spirit of merchandising, and by technology, and by the subordination of individuals to vast national and international organizations, there remains less and less room for personal adventure, risk, daring, the pursuit of danger and glory. In such a situation an extreme reaction, on the part of at least a few, was and is inevitable. Sorel's moralistic defense of revolutionary violence is one significant aspect of this reaction, as anarchism is a more general one. The more strongly our engineers, statisticians, industrialists and politicians strive to impose upon the world of man and nature their rigid scheme, the more radical and therefore the more dangerous will be the necessary revolt against them. But of course the path of moderation, the middle way between extremes, has always been the most difficult and therefore the one most seldom followed.

### CHAPTER III

#### ANARCHIST VIOLENCE: THE TERRORISTS

Thus far this essay has dealt chiefly with the theorists of the anarchist movement. Something should now be said of the darker side of anarchism, the exploits of the numerous men and women who attempted, not only in Russia but also in western Europe and America, to put into actual practice the sentiments, if not exactly the ideas, of Bakunin. These are the men whom Camus has called "les muertriers delicats."<sup>1</sup>

In 1878 a member of the Russian underground People's Will Party, a man named Kravchinsky, outlined the rules of terrorism in a tract called Death for Death, the guiding principle of which is that the most effective revolutionary propaganda consists in acts of spectacular violence--"the deed." Soon afterwards attempts were made on the lives of the Emperor of Germany, the King of Italy and the King of Spain. In 1879 a second attempt was made to kill the King of Spain, and a further attempt on the life of the Czar. In 1881 the repeated attempts to assassinate the Czar finally met with success.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Albert Camus, L'Homme Revolte (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), pp. 206-216.

<sup>2</sup>See p. 37.

In 1883 the German Emperor was again attacked, without success; his attacker was beheaded. In 1887 occurred the Haymarket bombing in Chicago, as a result of which seven policemen and an undetermined number of the assembled workers died; the guilty party or parties were never found but four self-acknowledged anarchists were hanged in retaliation. In the year 1892 an epidemic of dynamitings broke out in both Europe and America. In that same year the American anarchist Alexander Berkman tried without success to assassinate Frick, the chairman of the Carnegie Steel Company, in reprisal for the fatal shooting of eleven striking steel workers. In 1894 the President of France was assassinated and three years later the Prime Minister of Spain suffered the same fate. In 1898 the Empress Elisabeth of Austria, in 1900 King Umberto of Italy, in 1901 McKinley, the President of the United States, were assassinated by anarchists. Each assassination was followed, of course, by retaliatory executions and imprisonments, and by 1905 the anarchist-terrorist movement, outnumbered and outgunned by its better-organized opponents, came to an end in the land of its origin, Russia, with the hanging of Sazonov and Kaliayev (heroes or madmen, depending upon one's point of view) by the Czarist authorities.<sup>3</sup>

What lay behind this fantastic and prolonged warfare? In particular, what were the motives of the assailants?

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<sup>3</sup> Camus, op. cit., p. 207.

In some cases the motive appears to have been little more than a hatred which seems to border on criminal insanity, as in the case of Ravachol, guillotined in 1892 for complicity in a bombing. This man, soon made into a martyr by certain elements of the anarchist movement, is supposed to have died singing three lines from a famous anarchist song, the "Chant du Pere Duchesne":

Si tu veux etre heureux,  
                   Nom de Dieu!  
 Pends ton proprietaire . . . .<sup>4</sup>

Other examples of this type are numerous; one of the most distinguished, in his fashion, was Johann Most, who came to America in 1883 after serving eighteen months in a British prison for publicly acclaiming the assassination of the Russian Czar, and urging others to do the same with rulers everywhere. Soon after his arrival in the United States, Most published a booklet entitled Science of Revolutionary Warfare--A Manual of Instruction in the Use and Preparation of Nitroglycerine, Dynamite, Gun-Cotton, Fulminating Mercury, Bombs, Fuses, Poisons, Etc., Etc. Under the influence of Most, who apparently had a Bakunin-like personality, the Chicago anarchist Albert Parsons was soon printing such editorials as the following in his newspaper Alarm:

Dynamite! Of all the good stuff, that is the stuff! Stuff several pounds of this sublime stuff into an inch pipe (gas or water pipe), plug up both ends, insert a cap with a fuse attached, place this

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<sup>4</sup>As quoted by Bertrand Russell in Proposed Roads to Freedom (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1919), p. 53.

in the immediate vicinity of a lot of rich loafers who live by the sweat of other people's brows, and light the fuse. A most cheerful and gratifying result will follow.<sup>5</sup>

A few years later, after several bloody battles between striking workers and police in which the former were invariably the losers, someone--possibly an anarchist, possibly a hired gangster--threw a bomb at a police detachment which was attempting to disperse a mass meeting in Chicago's Haymarket Square. This event, the first use (in America) of dynamite as a political device, led to the celebrated trial of the Chicago anarchists, who were charged, not with having actually thrown the bomb, but with having inspired the act by their inflammatory speeches and editorials. The defendants were therefore compelled to defend anarchism in general and anarchist violence in particular, rather than their behavior on the day of the bombing. This they did, resorting to the traditional argument of the revolutionary: social injustice is so extreme that actual warfare between oppressors and oppressed is both justified and inevitable. However, only one of the defendants, Louis Lingg, expressed himself frankly and directly on the subject of violence, as in favor of it; the others took rhetorical refuge in heroic generalities. Parsons, for example, who had openly advocated the use of dynamite before the event, spoke as follows in his final speech to the court:

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. Louis Adamic, Dynamite, The Story of Class Violence in America (New York: The Viking Press, 1935), p. 47.



I am one of those, although myself a wage-slave, who hold that it is wrong to myself, wrong to my neighbor . . . for me . . . to make my escape from wage slavery by becoming a master and an owner of slaves myself . . . . This is my only crime, before high heaven.<sup>6</sup>

And Neebe, another of the condemned:

Well, these are the crimes I have committed: I organized trade unions. I was for reduction of the hours of labor, and the education of the laboring man . . . . There is no evidence to show that I was connected with the bomb-throwing, or that I was near it, or anything of that kind.<sup>7</sup>

Of the seven anarchists sentenced to hang for the bombing, only Louis Lingg seemed willing to assume, or able to understand that he should assume, moral responsibility:

I repeat that I am an enemy of the "order" of today, and I repeat that, with all my powers, so long as breath remains in me, I shall combat it. I declare frankly and openly that I am in favor of using force. I have told Captain Schaack [who had arrested him] and I stand by it: "If you fire upon us, we shall dynamite you!" Ah, you laugh! Perhaps you think, "You'll throw no more bombs"; but let me assure you that I die happy upon the gallows, so confident am I that the hundreds and thousands to whom I have spoken will remember my words; and when you shall have hanged us, then, mark my words, they will do the bomb-throwing! In this hope I say to you: I despise you! I despise your "order," your laws, your force-propped authority. Hang me for it!<sup>8</sup>

With the exception of Lingg, the Chicago anarchists failed to present a thoroughly consistent attitude. They had advocated class warfare, they were willing to consider themselves revolutionary soldiers, so to speak, and they were willing, as martyrs have always been, to sacrifice their lives, freely and bravely. But though they

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 78.    <sup>7</sup>Ibid.    <sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

were willing to surrender their lives, they were not quite prepared to surrender their innocence. Herein lay their inconsistency. For actually, crimes of violence committed in the name of the good, for the sake of justice, require a double sacrifice: the anarchist saint must be willing not only to die but, what is more difficult, at least for a saint, be willing to murder and destroy. The revolutionary saint must give up his virtue as well as his life. Otherwise, if he commits murder without recognizing it as a crime, no matter how noble the end desired, he contradicts his own idealism, which is supposed to spring from the conviction that modern civilization is based on diffuse but systematic murder--in a word, injustice. The Chicago anarchists were either unwilling or unable to recognize their own guilt, whether direct or indirect, in the Haymarket tragedy, and thus they failed to exemplify in a complete and satisfactory manner the tragic paradox inherently a part of anarchist violence.

The same failing must be attributed to the next defender of anarchy and crime, Emma Goldman (1869-1925). She, too, envisioned the modern world as the scene of a social struggle, and gave her sympathy to the cause and to the heroes of revolution; and yet, like the others, she could not face squarely the contradiction involved in the idea of killing for the sake of the good. In justifying violence, she resorts to quantitative measurement: "Compared with the wholesale violence of capital and government, political acts of violence are but

a drop in the ocean."<sup>9</sup> Or again, she denies that anarchism is responsible for such violence:

How utterly fallacious is the stereotyped notion that the teachings of Anarchism, or certain exponents of these teachings, are responsible for the acts of political violence.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time she maintains that anarchists, though they value human life above things, do not teach peaceful submission to the order of things. Resistance to tyranny, she says, is man's highest ideal.<sup>11</sup> Moving quickly from one position to another, Goldman condones acts of terrorism on the grounds that many besides anarchists have committed such acts, that society in general should bear most of the guilt anyway, and that these acts, at least when committed by anarchists, should be understood by the light of extenuating circumstances--as the revolt of highly moralistic natures, supersaturated with idealism and burdened with an agonizingly sensitive feeling for justice and injustice, against positive and particular crimes committed by organized authority against innocent people. And so, she argues, Berkman's attempt to kill Frick was the result not so much of his anarchist ideology as of his immediate sense of outrage when he learned that eleven steel workers had been killed by Frick's hired guards during the Homestead

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<sup>9</sup> Emma Goldman, Anarchism and Other Essays (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1911), p. 113.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

strike of 1892. "Yes, he was an Anarchist," she writes. (Berkman was also her lover.) "He gloried in the fact, because it was the only force that made the discord between his spiritual longing and the world without at all bearable. Yet not Anarchism, as such, but the brutal slaughter of the eleven steel workers was the urge for Alexander Berkman's act . . . ." <sup>12</sup> Of the young man who assassinated McKinley (whose crime is not specified) she writes:

Poor Leon Czolgosz, your crime consisted of too sensitive a social consciousness. Unlike your idealless and brainless American brothers, your ideals soared above the belly and the bank account. No wonder you impressed the one human being among all the infuriated mob at your trial--a newspaper woman--as a visionary, totally oblivious to your surroundings. Your large, <sup>13</sup> dreamy eyes must have beheld a new and glorious dawn.

On similar grounds she defends others among the "fastidious assassins," quoting with approval portions of Vaillant's speech to the court after he had been condemned to die for throwing a bomb into the Chamber of Deputies (one of the customary hazards of French political careers at the time). Vaillant relied upon the class-warfare argument; he considered himself not a would-be assassin (his act had produced no fatalities) but simply a warrior in the good cause of social justice:

I conclude, gentlemen, by saying that a society in which one sees such social inequalities as we see all about us, in which we see every day suicides caused by poverty, prostitution flaring at every street corner,--a society whose principal monuments are barracks and prisons--such a society must be transformed as soon as

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 99.      <sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

possible, on pain of being eliminated . . . from the human race. Hail to him who labors, by no matter what means, for this transformation!<sup>14</sup>

Vaillant's speech contained also the following brief and ironic touch:

Now, gentlemen, to me it matters little what penalty you may inflict, for, looking at this assembly with the eyes of reason, I can not help smiling to see you, atoms lost in matter . . . assume the right to judge one of your fellows.<sup>15</sup>

It does not seem to have occurred to Vaillant, nor does it occur to Emma Goldman, in quoting him, that he, Vaillant, may have been equally presumptuous in assuming the right to try, judge and condemn the members of the Paris Chamber of Deputies. In any case, Vaillant thought he had won the argument; nevertheless he lost his head--under the guillotine--despite appeals to the French president, Carnot. Carnot died soon afterwards, therefore, from the effects of a knife in the hand of another anarchist, Santa Caserio. The handle of the knife bore an engraving, to wit: "Vaillant!"<sup>16</sup> According to Emma Goldman, Caserio, like Vaillant and Berkman and Czolgosz and all the others, was "a sweet, tender plant, of too fine and sensitive a texture to stand the cruel strain of the world."<sup>17</sup> (The French authorities, as a matter of course, promptly executed the sweet, tender plant, who had made no attempt to escape from the scene of his act; escape, of course, would have constituted a violation

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 102-103.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 113-114.

of the terrorist code of honor.) She goes on to cite similar cases, and to defend them with the same type of argument. Violence is made understandable, is justified and must be forgiven, when the sympathetic observer considers the terrible strain existing between the world's injustice and the anarchist-idealists' supreme aspiration:

High strung, like a violin string, they weep and moan for life, so relentless, so cruel, so terribly inhuman. In a desperate moment the string breaks. Untuned ears hear nothing but discord. But those who feel the agonized cry understand its harmony; they hear in it the fulfillment of the most compelling moment of human nature.

Such is the psychology of political violence.<sup>18</sup>

In this conclusion Emma Goldman seems to be suggesting, indirectly, that something more difficult and troubling than outraged idealism is involved in the act of the assassin. But she does not make it explicit; to find examples of men and women facing the ultimate contradictions in the act of political murder it is necessary to review the cases of the Russian terrorists.

Here are found those capable of assuming their guilt as well as giving their lives. In the words of Camus, on whose sympathetic account of them the following paragraphs are based, they were the first and the last in history to attempt, "par la bombe et le revolver, par le courage aussi avec lequel ils marchaient a la potence, . . . de sortir de la contradiction et de creer les valeurs dont ils manquaient."<sup>19</sup> These people called themselves nihilists,

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 113-114.

<sup>19</sup>Camus, op. cit., p. 207.

denied God, denied conventional morality, denied all transcendental values, while trying to destroy the Russian autocracy through assassination and bombing; they assumed that the future would justify them, and that the sacrifice of their lives would exonerate their murders. A life for a life; a death for a death. How then, since their efforts at bringing tyranny to an end and establishing the reign of justice have proved conspicuously unsuccessful, were they able to "create the values they lacked"? In the view of Albert Camus, they did this by demonstrating, through their willingness for self-sacrifice, the essential brotherhood of all men, the unique and absolute worthwhileness of every individual; for Camus these are the bases and the only possible justification for rebellion and murder. But how is brotherhood established by killing, how is the value of the person proven by a double death? This is the problem which the Russian terrorists, almost alone among the revolutionaries of history, attempted to confront and to solve. As Camus says,

. . . Ces meurtriers delicats ont vecu le destin revolte dans sa contradiction la plus extreme. On peut croire qu'eux aussi, tout en reconnaissant le caractere inevitable de la violence, avouaient cependant qu'elle est injustifiee. Necessaire et inexcusable, c'est ainsi que le meurtre leur apparaissait. Des coeurs mediocres, confrontes avec ce terrible probleme, peuvent se reposer dans l'oubli de l'un des termes. Ils se contenteront, au nom des principes formels, de trouver inexcusable toute violence immediate et permettront alors cette violence diffuse qui est a l'echelle du monde et de l'histoire.

Mais les coeurs extremes dont il s'agit n'oubliaient rien. Des lors, incapables de justifier ce qu'ils trouvaient pourtant necessaire, ils ont imagine de se donner eux-memes en justification et de repondre par le sacrifice personnel a la question qu'ils se posaient. . . . Une vie est alors

payee par une autre vie et, de ces deux holocaustes, surgit la promesse d'une valeur.<sup>20</sup>

The promise of what value? For Camus, the answer is--the equal value of human lives, and the superiority of human lives to human ideas. For the Russian terrorists the revolution, no matter how exalted, could not justify the tactical murder of human beings. By "tactical murder" is meant the killing of others for the sake of one's own ideals and/or ambitions; the tactical murderer may be willing to risk his life but is never willing to give it up. For the orthodox Communist, for the Nazi, and even for the middle-class moralists of what is called the "free world," it is permissible, under certain though varying circumstances, to sacrifice others for the cause--whatever it may be--while carefully preserving one's own life. In order to understand Camus and the Russian anarchists of the terrorist period, it is necessary to keep the above distinction clearly in mind. The Russian anarchist felt that murder could be justified only through self-sacrifice; but an American diplomat, for example, or a Soviet commissar, is always ready and willing to send others out to kill and be killed without himself feeling the slightest obligation to surrender his own life. In other words, the diplomat, the commissar, takes for granted the subordination of human beings to ideas (e.g., for reasons of state a few soldiers may be sacrificed now and then on the frontiers of world power); in so doing the diplomat and the commissar in effect

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 211-212.



deny that value which the anarchist affirmed--the equal value of human lives. The world has always been dominated by diplomats and commissars and their like; in such a world equality has always been denied except by the rebellion of a few who were willing not only to kill but to die in order to prove their conviction. It is in this sense that Camus believes that they, the Russian terrorists, were able to create a value which had been non-existent. Was that enough to justify violence? To justify acts of violence which, furthermore, failed to bring about the ostensible ends for the sake of which they were committed? In the minds of the terrorists, in the mind of Camus, it was--and it is. For in this view, the equality of human lives is not only a value, it is the supreme value, the source and foundation of all other human values.<sup>21</sup> "Celui qui accepte de mourir, de payer une vie par une vie, . . . affirme du meme coup une valeur qui le depasse lui-meme en tant qu'individu historique."<sup>22</sup>

Extreme means for the sake of a supreme end--the anarchists lived in a world so melodramatic as to seem monstrous. And for them it was a monstrous world, a world, in the words of Kaliayev, "of blood and tears."<sup>23</sup> In such a world violence is necessary, as well as justifiable--passive non-resistance amounts to acquiescence in the murder of others--but for the anarchists of this "Golden Age" of revolution, violence for the sake of good required nothing less than the sacrifice of the self. In recognizing and acknowledging this

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 206-216.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

truth, the Russian revolutionaries made explicit what was perhaps merely implicit in the lives of their predecessors and counterparts in other countries.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to answer two questions concerning anarchism and political violence: first, to what extent is the traditional association of anarchism and violence supported by the evidence? and second, in so far as the association is warranted, how do anarchists attempt to justify the use of violence?

In answering the first question, we have found that some anarchist theorists, such as Godwin and Proudhon, opposed the use of violence, while others, such as Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Sorel, advocated the use of violence. Among those whom we have called the "terrorists," violence was not only advocated but actively practiced. There is no necessary connection between anarchism and violence; it is even possible, as the examples of Tolstoy and Gandhi illustrate, to be both an anarchist and a pacifist; but it is clear that, in general, anarchism has appeared on the historical scene as a revolutionary movement, that its most distinguished and influential leaders have freely advocated or at least accepted the necessity of violence, and that in practice, particularly in the Terrorist movement at the turn of the century, anarchism has been the ideological instigator of certain revolutionary acts--bombings and assassinations--which gave the anarchist movement as a whole its reputation for spectacular and (in the public mind) gratuitous outbursts of violence.

As we have seen, the reputation does not correspond exactly to the truth, but it comes close enough to place upon the more representative anarchists the burden of answering the second, and more important, question: excepting Godwin and Proudhon, how have anarchists attempted to defend the employment of revolutionary violence?

In order to further clarify the problems involved in this general question, we shall break it down into the following six secondary questions and summarize the answers, given or implied, by anarchists, to each: (1) Is violence self-justifying, that is, an intrinsic good? (2) If violence can be at best only an instrumental good, are the ends which violence is supposed to make possible sufficiently desirable in themselves to offset the disadvantages of the instrument? (3) Is it certain that the desired or revolutionary goal can be achieved only through the use of violence, and not by other means? (4) May not the means, in this case, being so dangerous in itself, actually distort or even destroy the desired end? (5) Does the history of rebellions and revolutions give us much assurance that violence is a useful method for promoting the general welfare? for the accomplishment of socially-valued ends? (6) If the answer to the preceding question is unknown or doubtful, is revolutionary violence justified only when it is clearly successful (in achieving the desired end)? Or is it possible that violence may be justifiable even when success is improbable or uncertain?

Is violence self-justifying? Godwin and Proudhon, in repudiating political violence in general, would also, of course, reject the idea that political violence could possibly be, in some sense, an intrinsic good, an end in itself. And Kropotkin, though allowing a generous place in his revolutionary scheme for both organized and individual acts of revolt, has nowhere suggested that violence could be in any way more than a disagreeable, even tragic but sometimes necessary instrument for the successful transformation of the social order. In considering Bakunin and his followers, however, and also in the case of Sorel, the question cannot be so easily dismissed.

Certainly Bakunin never openly advocated violence for its own sake. Like other revolutionaries he was a social visionary, and the ostensible aim of his life was the achievement of a better economic, political and social world. But in so far as he lived and acted in the belief that "the passion for destruction is a creative passion," to use his own words, he came very close to a doctrine implying the intrinsic value of violence. His was the all-or-nothing approach to politics; better to risk all that our civilization offers on the gamble for something better, he argued, than to passively acquiesce in the general injustice and cruelty of the status quo. Even this is not sufficient to make him out as a believer in the self-justification of violence, but it does reveal that for Bakunin, in the time that must elapse between an intolerable present and an apocalyptic future, revolutionary violence is the highest good.

Among some of Bakunin's followers in the nihilist and terrorist movement, the same tendency was pushed much farther, that is, beyond words and into action. Unfortunately for political theory, neither Bakunin nor his disciples were willing or able to face the full implications of this enthusiasm for violence, nor were any of them capable of giving the implied idea a theoretical formulation.

Although Sorel was far from being an active revolutionary in the manner of Bakunin, he went beyond the latter in his apology for political violence. Again, we do not find in Sorel, anymore than in Bakunin, a bald defense of violence for its own sake. But Sorel, a harder and more persevering thinker than Bakunin, was able to recognize the essential continuity of ends and means, the impossibility of arriving at a clear-cut distinction between violence as a means to the good and violence as a good in itself. For Sorel, however, this was not a difficulty but quite the opposite, an advantage. Rather than advocate violence as an unpleasant method to make possible a glorious tomorrow, Sorel advocated revolutionary violence as a glorious approach, clustered round with various sublime and military virtues, toward a goal which was for him merely a myth, an unmoved mover, the actual realization of which is of secondary importance. The struggle itself, with its concomitant expressions of heroism and devotion to a cause, is what matters, in this view. Is this a glorification of violence as its own reward? Yes; but not of mere violence, not of violence abstracted from the other qualities necessarily involved with it in any project as difficult

and epical as the general strike and the proletarian revolution. In Sorel's view the revolutionary struggle would be comparable, in its arduousness and sublimity, to the wars of the Greeks against the Persians, and also, to the martyrdoms of the early Christians. This being so, it is possible to say of Sorel that he advocated violence, meaning of course revolutionary violence, as an end in itself--as well as a necessary means to further ends. Bakunin may have felt this way, but he lacked the intellectual courage, or the intellectual energy, to make his feelings explicit and plausible. And in fact Sorel's position was unique; all other anarchists have either repudiated violence outright, or else accepted it as a necessary evil in a war against a greater evil.

Is violence justified by the ends which it is purported to serve? To this, the second part of the general question concerning the defense of revolutionary violence, we have seen that the anarchists, both theorists and terrorists--again with the usual exception of Godwin and Proudhon--have given for answer an unequivocal Yes. For Bakunin, Kropotkin and Sorel, and for their numerous active followers, the existing social order was considered so unjust and corrupt, and the possible future social order so just, honorable and in other respects desirable, that a violent revolution against the former, aiming at the realization of the latter, is fully justifiable. This conception has formed the usual basis of the revolutionary's argument: violence is justified because the present human situation, viewed in the light of hope, in the light of what might be possible, is intolerable, and because a violent

revolution would make real what had heretofore been only the ideal. The traditional anarchist revolutionary, typified and exemplified in such figures as Bakunin and Kropotkin (though not Sorel), regarded human nature with optimism; for them, most if not all of what we call evil can be blamed on the arrangement and structure of social institutions, not on some inherent defect in the minds or souls of men, and not on the limitations imposed on human life by the natural order itself. Both man and nature being good, it follows that harmony should prevail; if harmony does not prevail, it is because social institutions (the work, apparently, of unnatural men) have introduced an element of strife into the original scheme. Through revolution, directed by the appropriate ideals, these institutions can be abolished and the original order of things restored. Therefore, revolution, meaning revolutionary violence, is justified. Reducing the argument to such simple terms, we appear to be dealing in absolutes--an absolute good, an absolute evil. But there is nothing in the orthodox anarchist doctrine incompatible with the substitution, for these apparent absolutes, of the relative and the degree: revolution can be justified on the grounds that it makes possible the transition from a state of relatively great injustice in human affairs to a state or condition of relatively minor injustice (or suffering, or disorder) in human affairs. If the difference in degree is sufficient, in this view, then the midwifery of violence is defensible. The difference in degree must be great, of course, for if it is not the use of violent means--now assumed to be in itself an evil--is not justified.



Such a criterion for the justification of violence presents the revolutionist with further difficulties. In the first place, he is obliged, in advance of the event, to weigh the probable losses--due to violence--against the possible gains. And suppose, contrary to his expectations, the violent revolution fails (is crushed by its opponents); how then can he justify the use of the intrinsic evil, violence, when its use is followed by no discernible social improvement at all? And in the third place, even if the revolution is successful, (crushes its opponents and puts its program into effect), the philosophical revolutionary is still confronted with the appalling difficulty of attempting to weigh and measure such incommensurables as the loss in human lives (during the process of the revolt) against what we have called "social improvements." To be sure, we have said that the degree of improvement must be "great," that is to say, it must be truly revolutionary. But how can such things be determined? Neither Bakunin nor Kropotkin endeavored to give precise answers to questions such as these; they were content with approximations, as indeed they had to be: given an evil situation, as they conceived themselves and most of their fellow men to be living in, and the possibility of establishing what would seem, in comparison, to be a good social situation, then violence--if the only possible means to the desired end--appeared to them as obviously justifiable. If so much is granted, we have arrived at a partial justification of violence; it is only partial, however, and not complete, because nothing has yet been said about the necessity of violence.

Is violence the only possible means for the achievement of the desired result? If violence is regarded as an intrinsic evil, then its use cannot be fully justified through success alone; to give it a sufficient justification the anarchist must establish that his revolutionary ends cannot be achieved through better, meaning non-violent, means. Rather than resorting to violence and bloodshed, in other words, would it not be possible, perhaps even easier, to effect the desired improvements in the social order through education and propaganda, through peaceful agitation in one form or another, through piecemeal and incremental reforms, through a broadly evolutionary course of action rather than a violently revolutionary one?

The anarchist theorists, being serious revolutionaries, employed all means at their disposal for the furtherance of their cause. Again with the exception of Godwin and Proudhon, they included violence and the threat of violence among the means at their disposal. And in the case of Bakunin, Kropotkin and Sorel, it is clear that violence was regarded not only as a useful revolutionary instrument but also as an indispensable revolutionary instrument. The advocates of violence devoted most of their efforts toward a revolution through education; but all three assumed, in their various ways, that violence would sooner or later be necessary, for none of them had any hope that capitalism and the national State, together with their allied institutions, could be abolished through peaceful means alone. Kropotkin viewed with regret, Bakunin with

enthusiasm, Sorel with satisfaction, the eventual necessity for violence; their attitudes differed, but not their belief in the role of political violence: for all of them violence appeared as efficacious, necessary, and inevitable. Considering the history of modern Europe, and the fact that all important social changes had been accompanied by, or effected through, violent upheavals of some sort, this is perhaps not surprising.

May not violence, viewed as a means, distort or destroy the end which is sought through violence? This question, as we have seen, was fully considered by both Godwin and Proudhon; and they were so impressed by the dangers of violence that they concluded that its use, in the long run at least, would result in more harm than good. The other major anarchist theorists, and most of the practitioners who followed them, without giving the question the theoretical treatment which it deserves, assumed opposite conclusions. Neither Bakunin nor Kropotkin attempted to deal with the problems involved in this question; they assumed that violence, despite the risks involved in its use, would prove both fruitful (in social results) and necessary in the course of events, and this was, for them, sufficient justification.

Sorel gave more consideration to the problem than had his predecessors. Although his theoretical burden was lighter, in this instance, since the point of his argument implied the self-sufficiency, or intrinsic value of violence (rather than the conventional horror of violence), he was more keenly aware of the

disagreeable aspects of violence than either Bakunin and Kropotkin. For this reason he goes to great length, in his Reflections on Violence, to assure the reader that proletarian violence, as exercised through syndicalism and the general strike, while preserving its warlike qualities, and largely because of these warlike qualities, will not result in the atrocities and massacres, most of them carried out under a legalistic guise, which disgraced the great French Revolution. Why not? Because war, he believed, is always conducted according to certain rules, rules which preclude the slaughter of the innocent, non-combatants, and defenseless prisoners; furthermore the revolutionary war which he envisioned would be, not a wanton exercise in social vengeance, but a morally-inspired struggle for the attainment of social justice, a positive rather than negative use of violence. This sort of argument appears very dubious today; but in Sorel's time, before the full development of what is now called "total war," his belief in the moral superiority of war to blind revolt may have been at least plausible.

A final version of the idea that the means are fully as important as the end, that the end may be determined by the means, is found in the behavior of the Russian terrorists, who elevated assassination and self-sacrifice to the status of an ethical doctrine. For them there could be no attempt to deny the intrinsic evil--not good--of violence; and so they tried to complete the justification of revolutionary violence through martyrdom. Assuming violence to be useful, necessary and inevitable, as Bakunin and Kropotkin had

done, they nevertheless felt that something more was needed to make it morally acceptable. Efficacy, necessity and inevitability are not enough, in this view; the taking of human life (as in the act of assassination) remains a crime so great that it must be atoned for in the only way possible--the assumption of guilt and the deliberate sacrifice of the revolutionary's life. Thus they hoped, through such a supreme act of atonement, to justify violence by keeping in force the principle of reciprocity, the truth (or vital myth) of the essential equality of human lives. In this way and in this way only, they believed, could the old order be destroyed (and a new and finer order made possible) without destroying, at the same time, the traditional Western assumption that human dignity rests upon a prior belief in the ultimate value of every human life.

In evaluating the terrorist notion of self-sacrifice as an essential part of any justification of violence, it should be observed that the idea follows, to a great extent, from a choice in revolutionary tactics. Unable to organize any large-scale resistance to the Czarist regime, the Russian anarchists decided that the regime could be attacked and destroyed only through individual acts of violence--bombings and assassinations. But there are important differences between an organized revolt and an assassination; while the former may properly be compared to a war or battle, the latter most closely resembles the act of murder. No guilt is ordinarily attributed to the soldier who kills an enemy during a battle; but the murderer is regarded, as is to be expected, under quite a different

light. The terrorists were aware of the difference, even though they believed that the murders they committed for political purposes were necessary for the good of society, and they assumed, willingly, the burden of guilt for their acts. Atonement through self-sacrifice, therefore, while it may be necessary (in the anarchist morality) in justifying one particular type of violence--namely, assassinations--is not necessary in justifying what may be considered the more conventional form of political violence--namely, the large-scale organized revolt. The doctrine of self-sacrifice, while it may supply the would-be assassin with a worthy guide to conduct, supplies in itself neither a necessary or a sufficient justification of what is ordinarily meant by political violence. If political violence--meaning the organized insurrection--can be justified, made morally acceptable, this justification must be based on the broader grounds of efficacy and necessity, and on other possibilities. The question of ends and means, and the perversion of ends by the means, remains as crucial as ever; such traditional revolutionists as Bakunin and Kropotkin, assuming, perhaps, too much, failed to give the question the attention it requires; Sorel faced the question but could not resolve all the difficulties; and the Russian terrorists, although they lived and died in trying to solve the question, constituted such a special case that their example is not fully applicable to the problem.

Does the history of rebellions and revolutions give us much assurance that political violence is a useful method for promoting the general welfare? All anarchists (with the possible exception

of Sorel), being optimists, believed in the actuality of human progress, whether revolutionary or evolutionary. Godwin and Proudhon, opposed to the use of violence, were as progressive as their successors; they opposed violence because they felt it would retard rather than advance the cause of progress. Bakunin and Kropotkin, on the other hand, though aware that no outbreak of political violence or revolution had yet established the society which they felt desirable, still conceded that the revolutions of the past had accomplished much; their chief criticism was that the historical revolutions, such as the French, simply failed to go far enough--that they were inconclusive, though worthwhile--and that further revolts were needed to advance and eventually complete the course of human progress. It would never have occurred to them to doubt the reality of progress, even though they believed that humanity had barely begun its march toward the Golden Age; Kropotkin, the scientist, even went so far as to attempt to prove that social progress was an inevitable continuation of biological evolution, and far from opposing evolution to revolution, he looked upon revolutions as events or agencies which accelerated, from within, the general progressive course--onward and upward--of evolution. The course of evolution, though irreversible, is not pursued at a constant rate; and Kropotkin, taking the long view, thought of political violence as marking those periods of suddenly accelerated advance; in short, violence functions both as a cause, an efficacious agent, and as an effect, a symptom, of social evolution. Bakunin's view was much the same as Kropotkin's; neither

of them, therefore, were ever visibly troubled by the thought that the history of revolutions might prove to be, upon close examination, merely a record of tragic failures.

Sorel's attitude toward the matter was of course quite different; in the history of political violence it was the struggle, and not the concrete results of the struggle, which interested him. His apology for violence rests on grounds which have little concern with social progress; his view of human history is centered, not upon its evolutionary aspect, but upon its rhythmic cycles of moral decadence and moral renaissance, a pattern (if it is a pattern) which may be of secondary interest to the philosophical biologists, but which was for Sorel the point and purpose of human existence. If the heroism and sublimity of the struggle is what matters, then it makes little difference whether the outcome of the struggle is success or defeat; in his justification of political violence Sorel felt no need to endeavor to prove that historical revolutions had actually promoted the "general welfare," that is, had accomplished their ostensible social-political-economic ends. Sorel thought of himself as a pessimist, but there is nothing in his work that can offer much comfort to the members of that school of thought which condemns political violence (and political radicalism in general) on the basis of the judgment that revolutions are both unpleasant and futile, and that human progress is an illusion.

Neither Sorel nor Kropotkin and Bakunin, nor any other anarchist theorist, attempted to provide us with a conclusive answer



to the question of whether or not political violence, in the past, has proved to be a useful or necessary instrument of progress. Since most contemporary societies are in part the products of violence and revolution, the historians of each society, while condemning violence in general, tend to approve that portion of violence which led to the establishment of the society of which they are members; at the same time each historian is inclined to cast some doubt upon the value of those revolts which helped establish foreign nations; and almost always, all historians (though this is beyond their line of duty) are ready to condemn proposals for further political violence within the society of which they are members, while often willing to approve political violence if carried out abroad. Since historians themselves are unable to answer in a general way the question of historical connections between violence and progress, the anarchists are no doubt justified in choosing that assumption, among the several available, which best suits their own inclinations.

Given the difficulty, which amounts to an impossibility, of finding a satisfactory answer to the question asked above, the justification of violence remains, at best, still dubious. If the Sorelian defense of violence (violence for the sake of those military virtues which its practice is supposed to engender) cannot be accepted, and if the traditional argument of the revolutionary (violence an evil but nevertheless rewarding and necessary as an instrument of social advance) is likewise judged unacceptable, is there any other basis for a justification of political violence?

In order to subject the defense of violence to the greatest possible pressure, we must consider it from the point of view of the extreme pessimists, those who regard injustice and suffering as inevitable qualities of human life, the idea of progress as an illusion, and revolutionary violence as futile--or worse than futile, since such violence is not only incapable of alleviating misery but adds new sufferings, brutalities and injustices upon the old. Through the "tragic view of life," we reach the final question of this essay:

Can violence be justified only by success? By "success" is meant the achievement of those ends which political violence is intended to bring about. This does not mean that success, as here defined, would constitute a sufficient justification, in itself, of violence, but it does mean that success, in this sense, may be a necessary part of an adequate justification of violence. The pessimist view of things precludes even the possibility of such success; therefore we shall now consider the question of whether or not political violence might be justifiable even though it is fore-doomed, now and always, to failure.

As we have seen, such a question would seem of little importance to such revolutionaries as Bakunin and Kropotkin, whose faith in the reality of progress formed the foundation of their political philosophy. Neither of them ever gave the pessimist premise serious consideration, and so the only answer which can be abstracted from their work is an implied one: clearly, for Bakunin

at least, even if hope is delusory, universal happiness a foolish dream, and revolutions useless, rebellion would still be justifiable--justifiable and necessary. Why? Because, he would say, his honor, as a man, as a human being, required it. And Kropotkin, though his approach to violence was far more cautious, would no doubt, in the last resort, have sided with his countryman. The same is true for most of the other romantic revolutionaries of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: success is not necessary in the justification of violence, for the Lost Cause, no matter how hopelessly lost, may still be the Good Cause. Regarded from this intellectual vantage-point, where reason and emotion are profoundly entangled with one another, the image of "success" comes to seem less and less important in the justification of violence and revolution; no matter how exactly defined, "success" begins to assume, in such a context, that unmistakable aura of vulgarity which has always been one of the usual connotations of the word. It is even possible, in this connection, for temperaments of a certain type to find, in rebellion and violence, the certainty of defeat more appealing than the possibility of a victory. Once again we approach the domain of the political martyr.

For Sorel the question of success is of less relevance than any other confronting him, since he found success, as he would have meant it, not in the outcome of violence but in the process of violence. And here we note the convergence of the Sorelian ethic

and the more typical revolutionary morality of a Bakunin, an Emma Goldman, or an Albert Camus. Their basic resemblance becomes more apparent; all of them, whatever their differences in style, tactics, attitudes, and degrees or intensities of rebellion, are primarily moralists. In the minds and hearts of each, the moral struggle, the ancient preoccupation with good and evil, is uppermost, and the design of the future, the administration of utopia, becomes a comparatively insignificant concern.

But what has this to do with the justification of violence? it will be asked; are not all men of good will concerned with the question of good and evil? Is it necessary to indulge in or defend violence in order to establish the authenticity of one's concern? To this the implied answer of the anarchist, that ideal anarchist who represents and, in a general fashion, sums up all of the anarchists considered in this essay, with the usual exception of Godwin and Proudhon, would be as follows:

(1) If Sorel is correct, political violence is largely self-justifying, since in the course of a difficult struggle we see the emergence of those qualities--courage, devotion, heroism, comradeship--which are the glory of the human condition. But perhaps Sorel is mistaken. In that case we can justify violence (2) in the manner of Bakunin, Kropotkin and the revolutionary tradition; i.e., through properly-directed political violence we can destroy those institutions which enable one class of men to oppress all others, thereby creating a social condition in which the natural goodness of

the majority will establish the reign of liberty, equality, and fraternity. But (3) cannot this desirable state of affairs be brought about through peaceful means alone? Godwin and Proudhon believed that it could; but most other revolutionaries have believed that the conflict of interests between the rulers and the ruled is so deep that violence is both necessary and inevitable. If the intrinsic evil of violence is granted, however, (4) is not such a dangerous instrument likely to pervert or subvert the goals of the revolution? It is possible; even likely; but that is a risk we must take, since present conditions are intolerable and violence is inevitable anyway. But is there any historical justification (5) for taking such a risk? Have revolutions actually brought about any worthwhile improvement in the lot of most men? Is not progress largely an illusion? In answer to this, the anarchist says Yes, revolutions have played a part in the human advance, and a necessary part, and progress is not an illusion, though many historians, as well as philosophers, might disagree on this point. But even if the extreme pessimist is correct (says our ideal anarchist in conclusion) and progress in human affairs is illusory, and revolutions are not only futile but pernicious, creating more suffering than they allay, and our other proposed justifications of political violence are also rejected, we hold in reserve (6) the final appeal: violence and rebellion, when exercised in the name of a cause which we hold to be morally just, and after peaceful means have been attempted and failed,

can be justified as being--under the pressure of extreme circumstances-- both a true and a necessary expression of the human aspiration toward the good. Violence in itself is an evil, granted; but unless one takes up a pacifist position (which has difficulties of its own) all those who are concerned with issues of good and evil--"men of good will"--may someday find themselves confronted with that critical situation in which all moral alternatives have been eliminated, by circumstances, but two: passive submission to unquestioned wrong, or the exercise of violence. Even though the rebellion may be foredoomed to failure, in the sphere of practical results, and the ideal may never be realized, it is still necessary to keep the ideal alive and to maintain and preserve that state of tension between the good and the evil, between aspiration and resignation, which is the glory, and perhaps the essence as well, of civilization in the West.

This sort of argument has a persuasive sound; but of course it fails to satisfy the obvious objection that while "men of good will" may indeed be obliged to commit themselves to violence when confronted with the "critical situation" which allows no honorable alternative to violence, we have still not been given a precise and convincing description of what constitutes such a "critical situation." The descriptions have been forthcoming, from our anarchist revolutionaries; but they have not been precise, they have not been convincing--in the minds of the majority of men. The anarchists devoted the chief effort of their lives to the attempt to persuade their fellow men that the "critical situation" had engulfed them and

that political violence was therefore justified. But in this effort, for many and various reasons, they failed. And in so far as they failed in this, they also failed to justify violence.

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